

שיחה *icha*

Shabbaton in the Mountains

August 8-11, 2013
Wildacres Retreat, Little Switzerland, NC



The Binding of Abraham, Isaac, Sarah
and the Rest of Us

The Binding of Abraham, Isaac, Sarah and the Rest of Us

Dear Participants of the 2013 Sicha Shabbaton,

Welcome to our weekend, high in the Blue Ridge Mountains, where we will join a centuries' old conversation with the biblical story, The Binding of Isaac.

When we listen carefully and add our voices to the ongoing conversation, we discover a place for ourselves within a long tradition of asking questions, of voicing doubt, of solidifying belief; we uncover a tradition and vocabulary of praise, of surprise, and of protest, disappointment, and outrage.

We have not invented perplexity, impiety, or uncertainty. We join a conversation in which many before us have imagined themselves as Abraham, as Isaac, as Sarah. The conversation demands and ensures the ongoing search for meaning, the ongoing quest for new questions. The conversation is a characteristic of belonging to a people that refuses to let its founding stories have the last word.

We engage this story, just weeks before it is read in the synagogue on Rosh HaShannah. May our learning make for a “noisier” reading this year. May we come to understand that we are not lonely, merely contemporary, readers; but that we are well represented and invested in a conversation whose voices describe Jewish life.

Shana Tova,
Rabbi Steven Sager



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שיחה *Sicha*
continuing the conversation

Genesis 22:1-19

וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה
וַהֲאֱלֹהִים נִסָּה אֶת-אַבְרָהָם
וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו
אַבְרָהָם
וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי.
וַיֹּאמֶר קַח-נָא
אֶת-בְּנֶךְ
אֶת-יְחִידְךָ
אֲשֶׁר-אַהֲבָתָּ
אֶת-יִצְחָק
וְלֵךְ-לְךָ אֶל-אֶרֶץ מֹרְיָה
וְהַעֲלִיחוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה
עַל אֶחָד הַהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ.
וַיִּשָּׂם אַבְרָהָם בִּבְקָר
וַיַּחֲבֹשׁ אֶת-חֲמֹרוֹ
וַיִּקַּח אֶת-שְׁנֵי נְעָרָיו אִתּוֹ
וְאֶת יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ
וַיִּבְקַע עֵצִי עֹלָה
וַיֵּקֶם וַיֵּלֶךְ
אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם
אֲשֶׁר אָמַר לוֹ אֱלֹהִים.
בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי
וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת-עֵינָיו
וַיִּרְא אֶת-הַמָּקוֹם מֵרָחוֹק.
וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל נְעָרָיו
שְׁבוּ-לָכֶם פֹּה עִם-הַחֲמֹר
וְאֲנִי וְהַנֶּעַר נֵלְכָה עַד-כֹּה
וְנִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְנָשׁוּבָה אֵלֵיכֶם.
וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָהָם אֶת-עֵצִי הָעֹלָה
וַיִּשֶׂם עַל-יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ
וַיִּקַּח בְּיָדוֹ
אֶת-הָאֵשׁ וְאֶת-הַמַּאֲכָלָת
וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו.

¹It was after these things
that God tested Abraham
and said to him
Abraham
and he said, Here I am.
²And He said, take now
your son
your only one
whom you love
Isaac
and go to the land of Moriah
and offer him there as an offering
on one of the mountains as I will tell you.
³And Abraham rose in the morning,
saddled his ass
and took his two servants with him
along with Isaac, his son;
he split the offering wood,
got ready and went
to the place
of which God had spoken to him.
⁴On the third day
Abraham raised his eyes
and saw the place afar off.
⁵And Abraham said to his servants
stay here with the ass
while I and the lad go up there
and we will worship and return to you.
⁶Abraham took the offering wood
and put it on his son Isaac's back
and he took in his hand
the fire and the knife
and the two of them walked on together.

וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק
 אֶל-אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו
 וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי
 וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִנִי בְנִי
 וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה הָאֵשׁ וְהָעֵצִים
 וְאַיִה הַשֶּׁה לְעֹלָה.
 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם
 אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה-לוֹ
 הַשֶּׁה לְעֹלָה בְנִי
 וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו.
 וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם
 אֲשֶׁר אָמַר לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים
 וַיְבִן שָׁם אַבְרָהָם
 אֶת-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ
 וַיַּעֲרֹךְ אֶת-הָעֵצִים
 וַיַּעֲקֹד אֶת-יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ
 וַיִּשֶׂם אוֹתוֹ עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ
 מִמַּעַל לָעֵצִים.
 וַיִּשְׁלַח אַבְרָהָם אֶת-יָדוֹ
 וַיִּקַּח אֶת-הַמַּאֲכָלֶת
 לְשַׁחֵט אֶת-בְּנוֹ.
 וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹוֹ מְלֹאךְ יְהוָה
 מִן-הַשָּׁמַיִם
 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אַבְרָהָם
 וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִנִי.
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ
 אֶל-הַנֶּעַר וְאַל-תַּעַשׂ לוֹ מְאוּמָה
 כִּי עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי
 כִּי יִרְאֵה-אֱלֹהִים אֶתָּה
 וְלֹא חִשַּׁכְתָּ
 אֶת-בְּנְךָ אֶת-יְחִידְךָ
 מִמֶּנִּי.

⁷Isaac speaking

to Abraham his father

said, My father

and he said, Here I am, my son;

said Isaac, Here are the fire and the wood

but where is the lamb for the offering?

⁸And Abraham said,

God will see to it himself regarding

the lamb for the offering, my son

and the two of them walked on together.

⁹They came to the place

of which God had spoken to him

and Abraham built there

an altar

and he arranged the wood,

bound Isaac his son

and placed him on the altar

on top of the wood.

¹⁰Abraham reached out his hand

and took the knife

to slaughter his son.

¹¹And an angel of the Lord called to him

from the heavens

and said, Abraham, Abraham

and he said, here I am.

¹²And he said, Do not lift your hand

against the boy or harm him in any way

for now I know

that you are a God fearer

in that you have not withheld

your son, your only one

from me.

וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת-עֵינָיו
 וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה-אֵיל אַחֵר
 נֶאֱחָז בִּסְבָךְ בְּקִרְנָיו
 וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָהָם
 וַיִּקַּח אֶת הָאֵיל
 וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ לְעוֹלָה
 תַּחַת בְּנוֹ.
 וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָהָם
 שֵׁם-הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא
 יְהוֹה יִרְאֶה
 אֲשֶׁר יֵאמַר הַיּוֹם
 בְּהָר יְהוֹה יִרְאֶה.
 וַיִּקְרָא מֵלֶאֱדָן יְהוֹה
 אֶל-אַבְרָהָם שְׁנִית
 מִן-הַשָּׁמַיִם.
 וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי נְאֻם-יְהוֹה
 כִּי יַעַן אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת-הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה
 וְלֹא חָשַׁכְתָּ
 אֶת-בְּנֶךְ
 אֶת-יְחִידְךָ.
 כִּי-בָרַךְ אֲבָרְכְּךָ
 וְהִרְבָּה אֲרַבָּה אֶת-זֶרְעֶךָ
 כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם
 וְכַחֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל-שְׂפַת הַיָּם
 וַיִּרֶשׁ זֶרְעֶךָ אֶת שַׁעַר אֹיְבָיו.
 וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְּזֶרְעֶךָ כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ
 עֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹלִי.
 וַיָּשָׁב אַבְרָהָם אֶל-נַעֲרָיו
 וַיִּקְמוּ וַיֵּלְכוּ יַחְדָּו
 אֶל-בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע
 וַיֵּשֶׁב אַבְרָהָם בְּבְאֵר שֶׁבַע.

¹³Then Abraham raised his eyes
 and saw a ram behind
 caught in the thicket by its horns;
 then Abraham went
 and took the ram
 and offered it as an offering
 instead of his son.

¹⁴Abraham called
 the name of the place
 Adonai Yireh
 as it is said to this day,
 on the mountain of the Lord one is seen.

¹⁵And an angel of the Lord called
 to Abraham a second time
 from the heavens.

¹⁶He said, I swear by my Self says the Lord
 that because you did this thing
 and you did not withhold
 your son
 your only one.

¹⁷I will surely bless you
 and certainly multiply your seed
 as the stars in the heavens
 and as the sands on the sea shore
 and your seed will seize the gates of its enemies.

¹⁸And all peoples of the earth will be blessed by your seed
 since you listened to my voice.

¹⁹Then Abraham returned to his servants
 and they made ready and went together
 to Be'er Sheva
 and Abraham dwelled in Be'er Sheva.

Everyone is Abraham

כָּל אֶחָד שֶׁמִּשְׁפִּים בִּבְקָר הוּא לְבַד, Everyone who gets up in the morning is alone,
 הוּא מְבִיא אֶת עֲצָמוֹ לַעֲקֹדָה, הוּא אֲבִרָהם, bringing himself to the binding, he is Abraham,
 הוּא יִצְחָק, הוּא הַחֲמֹר, הוּא הָאֵשׁ he is Isaac, he is the donkey, he is the fire
 הוּא הַמַּאֲכָלָת, הוּא הַמְּלָאךְ, he is the knife, he is the angel,
 הוּא הָאֵיל, הוּא הָאֵלֹהִים. he is the ram, he is God.

Yehuda Amichai
 Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager



Legacy

הָאֵיל בָּא אַחֲרוֹן וְלֹא יָדַע אַבְרָהָם כִּי הוּא מֵשִׁיב לְשֵׁאלַת הַיֶּלֶד, רֹאשִׁית-אוֹנוֹ בְּעֵת יוֹמוֹ עָרֵב.	The ram came last but Abraham did not know that it answered the boy's question, his waxing potency in his waning day.
נָשָׂא רֹאשׁוֹ הַשֶּׁבַּ. בְּרֹאוֹתוֹ כִּי לֹא חָלַם חֲלוֹם וְהַמֶּלֶךְ נָצַב- נִשְׁרָה הַמֶּאֱכָלֶת מִיָּדוֹ.	The old man raised his head. When he saw that he was not dreaming that the angel stood firm- the knife fell from his hand.
הַיֶּלֶד שֶׁהִתֵּר מֵאֲסוּרָיו רָאָה אֶת גֵּב אָבִיו.	The boy, freed from his bonds, saw his father's back.
יִצְחָק, כְּמִסְפָּר, לֹא הֶעֱלָה קֶרְבֵּן. הוּא חֵי יָמִים רַבִּים, רָאָה בְּטוֹב, עַד אוֹר עֵינָיו כָּהָה.	Isaac, as it is told, was not sacrificed. He lived a long life, saw the good, until his eyes dimmed.
אָבֵל אֶת הַשָּׁעָה הַהִיא הוֹרִישׁ לְצֶאֱצָאָיו. הֵם נוֹלָדִים וּמֵאֱכָלֶת בְּלִבָּם.	But that hour he bequeathed to his descendants. They are born with a knife in their hearts.

Hayyim Gouri, "Legacy"
Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager

The Binding of Sarah

A son was born to Abraham when he was one hundred years old. Yet, in the end, the Holy One said to him: *Take your son... and offer him as a burnt offering* (Genesis 22:2). Then Abraham, our father, made a three day journey, as it is written: *On the third day, Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar* (Genesis 22:4). What did he see? He saw a cloud encircling the top of the mountain. He said to his son: My son, do you see what I see? Isaac answered: Yes. Abraham continued: And what do you see? Isaac answered: I see a cloud encircling the top of the mountain.

Abraham then said to his servants: Do you see the same thing that we see? No, they replied. Abraham said: Since you see nothing and the ass sees nothing, you stay here with the ass (Genesis 22:5)—you who are the ass people. What did Abraham do next? He took Isaac his son and climbed to the top of the mountain. Then he built an altar and arranged the wood, set the kindling in place, and bound Isaac on the altar. Abraham took the knife in his hand to slaughter him. Had not the Holy One, blessed be he, said: *Do not raise your hand against the boy* (Genesis 22:12) Isaac would have been slaughtered!

When Isaac returned to his mother, she said to him: My son, what did your father do to you? Isaac answered: Father brought me up mountains and down hills until he brought me to the top of a particular mountain. Next, he built an altar, arranged the wood, and set the kindling in place. Then he bound me on the top of the altar and took the knife in his hand to slaughter me. Had not the Holy One, blessed be he, told Father: *Do not raise your hand against the boy*, I would have been slaughtered.

She said to him: Oh! No! Son of an ill fated mother! If the Holy One, blessed be he had not said do not raise your hand against the boy you would have been slaughtered! She had barely finished saying this when her soul left her. As it is written immediately after this—*Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to cry over her* (Genesis 23:2). Where did he come from? He came from Mount Moriah where he had bound Isaac.

(from Pesikta d'Rav Kahanna 25:3)

Akedah

עֶקֶדָה

עֵינַיִךְ נָחוּ עָלַי בְּאַהֲבָה רַבָּה,

זָרָה, אַחֲרֵת,

וְלֹא יָדַעְתִּי-

עַד כְּבִרְק הַמֶּאֱכָלֶת :

אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה לּוֹ הַשֶּׁה,

וְאֲנִי אֲנִי-

Your eyes rested on me with great love,

Strange, different,

But I did not know-

Until the flash of the knife:

God will provide himself the lamb

And I, I-

S. Shifra
Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager

The Binding

הַרְמָקוֹל צָרַח	The loudspeaker barked
"קַחֵי נָא אֶת יְחִידְךָ,	"take your only one,
אֶת זֶה אֲשֶׁר אָהַבְתָּ."	the one you love."
וְהַמִּזְבֵּחַ הָרוּס. עֲצֵי	And the altar is ruined. The wood of
הַמַּעֲרָכָה פְּזוּרִים. הַנְּעָרִים	the pyre scattered. The kids
מְגַלְגְּלִים כְּדוּרֵי	roll balls of
אֶהָבָה עַל-פְּנֵי דָשָׁא	love across the grass
צְעִירוֹתָם. לְשׁוֹנָם	in their youthfulness. Their tongues
חֹמָה. הַמֵּאֲכֶלֶת נוֹצָצַת	hot. The knife flashes
בְּוָאֲדֵי לְאוֹר יָרֵחַ	in the wadi by the moon's light
שֶׁל אֶמְצַע הַגְּבוּל.	at the middle of the border.
הַמַּלְאָךְ הַלָּבָן, זֶה	The white angel, the one
שֶׁתָּמִיד צוֹעֵק	who always shouts
"אַל נָא תִשְׁלַחֵי יָדְךָ"	"don't lift your hand"
בְּחִפְשָׁה רְגִילָה.	is on regular leave.

Aliza Shinhar
Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager

[אֲנִי לֹא אֶקְרִיב] [I Will Not Offer]

אֲנִי לֹא אֶקְרִיב I will not offer
בְּכוֹרִי לְעוֹלָה my first born as a sacrifice
לֹא אֲנִי. not me.

בְּלֵילוֹת אֱלֹהִים וְאֲנִי During the nights God and I
עוֹרְכִים חֲשׁוֹנוֹת arrange our accounts
מֶה מְגִיעַ לָמִי. what is owed to whom.
אֲנִי יוֹדַעַת וּמַכִּירָה I understand and recognize
תּוֹדָה. thanks.
אֲבָל לֹא אֶת בְּנִי But not my son
וְלֹא and not
לְעֹלָה. for an offering.

Ra'ayah Harnick
Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager



The Binding of Abraham and Isaac:

The Two Walked On Together

The binding story of Genesis 22 twice observes of Abraham and Isaac that *the two of them walked on together*. The repetition frames the only conversation between the father and son—a fact not lost on ancient sages. For them, the conversation broke an uneasy silence but resolved into a silence of solidarity and mutual commitment.

Here is the Bible text followed by the rabbinic expansion of the story.

וַיִּקַּח בְּיָדוֹ	And he took in his hand
אֶת-הָאֵשׁ וְאֶת-הַמַּאֲכָלִת	the fire and the knife
וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו.	and the two of them walked on together.
וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק	⁷ Isaac speaking
אֶל-אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו	to Abraham his father
וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי	said, My father
וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי בְנִי	and he said, Here I am, my son;
וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה הָאֵשׁ וְהָעֵצִים	said Isaac, Here are the fire and the wood
וְאַיֵּה הַשֶּׁה לְעֹלָה.	but where is the lamb for the offering?
וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם	⁸ And Abraham said,
אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה-לוֹ	God will see to it himself regarding
הַשֶּׁה לְעֹלָה בְנִי	the lamb for the offering, my son
וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו.	and the two of them walked on together.

The Two Walked On Together

(an ancient rabbinic tale, expanded)

Abraham and Isaac left the servants and the ass behind and *the two of them walked on together* carrying only provisions for the sacrifice. Abraham carried the fire and the knife, while Isaac carried the wood. Any passerby would see at a glance that they carried only what was necessary for a sacrifice except—curiously—the sacrifice, itself.

Along with their ritual implements, pilgrims always carry their doubts. Legend says that in these canyons, even their silent ambivalence echoes, coming back to them from all angles. *There is no speech*, said the psalmist, *and yet their voice is heard*. Questions of resolve and commitment rise; they take voice and they take shape. Samael which means, *God has heard*, is the human shape of a pilgrim's doubt. Each pilgrim must reckon with the angel, Samael, who can appear in the guise of a fellow traveler.

As *the two walked on together*, Samael went to father Abraham and chided him: What is this, old man! Have you lost your mind? Are you really on your way to slaughter a son granted to you at the age of one hundred?! I am, said Abraham. Samael replied: And if your God sets another test, do you imagine that you would bear that one, as well? I do believe it, Abraham said. Samael continued: And let's imagine that tomorrow your God condemns you as a murderer—what then? I will be guilty, Abraham replied.

Seeing that he could not provoke Abraham, Samael went to Isaac, saying: You are the son of a very unhappy mother! Don't you know that you are your father's sacrifice? Isaac replied: Because I accept my fate, the sacrifice is not his, alone; it is also mine. Well then, said Samael, I suppose that your half brother, Ishmael, will inherit all of those beautiful clothes that your mother made just for you.

Now, words are sometimes effective in part even if they are not completely effective. Hence, it was a shaken Isaac who broke the silence with his father by saying: *Father...* He spoke like a child so as to arouse his father's compassion. Abraham responded in kind: *Yes—my son*. Isaac continued: *Here are the fire and the wood—but where is the lamb for the offering?*

Abraham thought: Samael has gotten to him! I'd like to drown him! Abraham answered Isaac quietly. His slow cadence and inflection carried the truth—but only for one who knew how to listen. *God will see to it himself... Regarding the lamb for the offering?—my son*. The servants would not have understood. But Abraham was certain that Isaac knew: *the offering is my son*. And now, once again, silence prevailed as *the two of them walked on together*—one prepared to slaughter, the other to be slaughtered.

(Based on Genesis Rabbah 56:4)

The Binding of God

(Two Interpretive Legends)

Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife—He reached for the knife even as the tears streamed from his eyes. And these tears, prompted by a father's emotion dropped into Isaac's eyes. Yet even so, Abraham's heart rejoiced to obey the will of his Creator.

Protesting angels assembled into groups up above. Their cries soaked into the very mountain from which a prophet would someday wring them and tell the story: *Angels of peace wept bitterly... They complained: He has broken the covenant! He rejects the cities!* (Isaiah 33:7-8) The angels were outraged that God was ready to break the covenant with Abraham—a covenant to make Isaac's children into a nation. God was taking no pleasure in the Temples that would be built on the mountain, each Temple in its own Jerusalem—the very city that he promised to give to Isaac's descendants! *He despises the man*, the prophet continued, the man to whom he has made a solemn vow. And if that man, Abraham, had no merit then no creature had any value to God! The angels were angry, disappointed, and frightened.

(based on Genesis Rabbah 56:8)

Abraham named the place Adonai Yireh, which means, The Lord Sees, or The Lord Takes Note, or The Lord Provides (Genesis 22:14). But what did Abraham have in mind by so naming the mountain? Rabbi Bibi the Elder said in Rabbi Yohanan's name: Abraham said to God: Master of the Universe! When you ordered me: *Take your son, your only son* I could have answered by saying that yesterday you swore to me: *It is through Isaac that offspring will be continued for you* (Genesis 21:12) and now you say: *Take your son?! But heaven forbid that I should act that way. I suppressed my compassion in order to do your will. And now, whenever Isaac's children are in trouble, you must remember that binding in their favor and be filled with compassion for them!*

Therefore, *Abraham named the place Adonai Yireh*— meaning Adonai, Take note! This very mountain binds you to see, to take note, and to provide for Isaac's children throughout the generations.

(based on Genesis Rabbah 56:10)

The Binding of the Mountain (1)

אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק, עֲנֵנִי, אָמַר הָהָר שֶׁנֶּעֱקֵד לְמִקְוָמוֹ God of Isaac, answer me, said that mountain bound to its place
 וְאֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק נֶעֱנָה and the God of Isaac answered
 וּבָא and came
 וַהֲתִיר לָהָר לָנוּעַ. and freed the mountain to move.

Rivka Miriam

Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager

The Binding of the Mountain (2)

קַח אֶת בִּנְךָ אֶת יְחִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר אַהֲבָתָּ, Take your son, your only one whom you love
 וְהַעֲלֵהוּ לְעֹלָה, כִּדְ אֱלֹהִים לְאַבְרָהָם. and offer him as an offering, so God to Abraham.
 וְאֵנַחְנוּ קוֹרְאִים לוֹ אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ. אֵיזָה אָב And we call him Abraham our father. What kind of father
 הוּא לָנוּ, שֶׁהָיָה מוֹכֵן לְהִקְרִיב אֶת בְּנוֹ עַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ! is he to us who was ready to sacrifice his son on the altar!
 דָּבָר אַחֵר, אֱלֹהִים לֹא יָדַע אֶהְבָּה לְבָנִים, Another interpretation, God did not know love for children,
 אֲבָל הוּא יָדַע אֶהְבָּה לְהָרִים but he knew love for mountains
 וּמִכָּל הָהָרִים אָהַב אֶת הָהָר הַמִּוֶּרְיָה and of all the mountains he loved Mt. Moriah
 הָהָר יְחִידוֹ אֲשֶׁר אָהַב וְלָכֵן עָשׂוּ עָלָיו his only mountain which he loved and so upon it took place
 אֶת הָעֲקִידָה וְאֶת בְּתֵי הַמִּקְדָּשׁ. the binding and the two Temples.

Yehuda Amichai

Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager

The Real Hero of the Binding Was the Ram

הגבור האמתי של העקדה היה האיל
שלא ידע על הקנוניה בין האחרים.
הוא כמו התנדב למות במקום יצחק.
אני רוצה לשיר עליו שיר זכרון,
על הצמר המתולתל ועל עיניו האנושיות
על הקרניים שהיו שקטות כל כך בראשו
ואחר שנשחט עשו מהן שופרות
לקול תרועת מלחמתם
או לקול תרועת שמחתם הגסה.

אני רוצה לזכר את התמונה האחרונה
כמו תצלום יפה בעתון אפנה מעדן:
הצעיר השזוף והמפנק בבגדיו המגנדרים
ולידו המלאך הלבוש שמלת משי ארכה
לקבלת פנים חגיגית.
ושניהם בעינים רקות
מביטים אל שני מקומות רקים

ומאחוריהם, כרקע צבעוני, האיל
נאחז בסבך בטרם שחיטה.
והסבך ידידו האחרון.

המלאך הלך הביתה
יצחק הלך הביתה
ואברהם ואלהים הלכו מזמן.

אבל הגבור האמתי של העקדה
הוא האיל.

The real hero of the binding was the ram
who didn't know of the conspiracy among the others.
He apparently volunteered to die in Isaac's place.
I want to sing a memorial song about him.
About curly wool and about his human eyes
about horns so quiet on his living head
that after slaughter they made into shofars
to trumpet their wars
or to trumpet their crude joy.

I want to remember the last picture
like a beautiful photograph in an glitzy fashion magazine:
the young man, tanned and pampered, in his fancy clothes
next to him the angel dressed in a long silk gown
fit for a party.
The two of them with vacant eyes
staring at two empty places

and behind them, like a colorful backdrop, the ram
caught in the thicket before the slaughter.
The thicket his last friend.

The angel went home
Isaac went home
Abraham and God were long gone.

But the real hero of the binding
is the ram.

Poem by Yehuda Amichai,
Translated by Rabbi Steven Sager

Graphic design by Galia Goodman



Deeds of the Ancestors

ואַחֲרֵי הָעֲקֻדָּה?
אָז הִתְחִיל הַנִּסְיוֹן הַקָּשֶׁה מִכֻּלָּם.
אַבְרָהָם לָקַח אֶת בְּנוֹ לְמְרוֹצֵי גַמְלִים.
טִיַּל אֹתוֹ מִנְהַר פָּרָת עַד נְהַר מִצְרַיִם,
שָׁחָה לְצִדּוֹ, מִשְׁגִּיחַ בְּשִׁבְעַ עֵינָיִם,
בְּמִימֵי אֵילָת. וּבְשׁוּבָם הַבֵּיתָה,
שָׁחַט צֹאן וּבָקָר לָרֹב,
הַכֹּל רַךְ וְטוֹב.
נִיחוּחַ שִׁירִים וּבִשְׂרִים וּשְׂרָרִים
וּקְרוֹאִים טוֹבֵי-עֵין מִמְּרָחָק.
יִצְחָק אָכַל וְאָכַל, אָכַל
וְשָׁתָק.
אַבְרָהָם קָנָה לְאִשְׁתּוֹ מְעִיל פָּרוּהָ,
עֲדִיִּים מִזֶּהָב-פָּרוּזִים.
הִתְקַן לָהּ תְּאוֹרוֹת-חֲרוּם בָּאֶהָל,
הֵבִיא לָהּ מִגִּפְּתֵי מִאֲרָם-נְהַרִים,
חֲשִׁישׁ מִתַּרְשִׁישׁ,
קִנְמוֹן מִלְּבָנוֹן.
שָׂרָה, שֶׁבָּלְתָה בֶּן לַיְלָה,
לֹא פָשְׁטָה אֶת בִּגְדֵי הָאֲבִלוּת.
אַבְרָהָם הִתְפַּלֵּל לֵאלֹהָיו שְׁחֲרִית וְעֶרְבִית.
תָּלָה קְפוֹת-צַדִּיקָה עַל כָּל הָאֲשָׁלִים.
עָשָׂה תוֹרָתוֹ לַיְלָה וַיּוֹמָם.
צָם,
וְהָלִין מִלְּאָכִים בְּחֲצֵי חֹנָם.
הַקּוֹל מִמָּרוֹם נִעְלָם.
וְהַקּוֹל שֶׁבְּתוֹכוֹ
(הַיָּחִיד שֶׁנּוֹתַר לוֹ)
אָמַר : בֶּן, הֲלָכְתָּ,
מֵאֲרָצְךָ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ,
וְעַכְשָׁיו, סוּף-סוּף, מֵעַצְמְךָ.

And after the binding?
Then began the most difficult trial of all.
Abraham took his son to camel races,
hiked with him from the Euphrates to the Nile,
swam with him, watching him with seven eyes,
in the waters of Eilat. And when they returned home,
slaughtered lots of sheep and cattle,
everything tender and good.
A pleasing fragrance of songs, meat and muscle
and well-wishers from afar.
Isaac ate and ate, ate
and was silent.
Abraham bought his wife a fur coat,
and fine gold jewelry.
He installed emergency lighting in the tent,
he bought boots as a present from the fertile crescent,
hashish from Tarshish,
cinnamon from Lebanon.
Sarah, who withered overnight,
never shed her mourning clothes.
Abraham prayed to his God morning and evening.
He hung charity boxes on all of the tamarisk trees.
Learned his Torah night and day,
fasted,
offered shelter to angels for almost nothing.
The voice from above ceased
And the voice within him
(the only one left him)
said: Yes, you left,
your land, your birthplace, and your father's house,
and now, at the end, you have left yourself.